

T H E

S N A R E S

O F

P R O S P E R I T Y.

THE

STANDARD

OF

PROSPERITY

1026. f. 4. 15
15

THE
SNARES OF PROSPERITY.
A
SERMON.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,
AN ESSAY ON VISITING.

BY JOHN CLAYTON.

The Prosperity of Fools shall destroy them.

SOLOMON.

Prosperity dissolves the yielding soul,
And the bright Sun of shining fortune melts
The firmest Virtue down. Beware, my friends,
Be greatly cautious of *Prosperity*!
Defend your sliding hearts; and, trembling, think
How those who buffeted *Affliction's* waves
With vig'rous Virtue, sunk in *Pleasure's* calm.

MORE.

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T O T H E
R E A D E R.

TEN years I have been situated in London: That space of time has given me an opportunity of making observations, by which I wish I had improved more, and were better able to improve others.

I have seen with pleasure, and do see, in the religious world, many faithful witnesses to the truth and spirit of the Gospel; but am the grieved spectator of others, who did run well, and are hindered; yea, some are reverted wholly to the course of this world.

I have

I have considered these painful revolutions in Characters, to be, not so much the fault of individuals, as that of *human nature*, placed in circumstances of temptation, strengthened with opportunity. This City is famed for Commerce, to which, under Providence, it owes it's prosperity. Men professing godliness, are not forbidden, by reason or religion, to avail themselves of lawful occasions, which favour their secular interests. Many persons, whose beginnings were small, have greatly increased. This accession of fortune is a furnace, in which the nature of their profession is tried; and, in the fiery trial, we are not to expect the faith of all will be found to praise, and honour, and glory.

The following Sermon was preached some time ago, and is now printed, not because it has any claims, in point of composition; but to counteract the ill effects of increasing wealth, and to stir up to the duties binding on a superior condition. These reasons may recommend it to a candid perusal, or be it's excuse.

Among

Among those who profess a regard to the unsecular Kingdom of CHRIST, we find, too frequently, the first proofs of success in business, are made public, by expensive fashionable dress, house, furniture, equipage, and frequent paying and receiving visits.

Ministers who are anxious to win souls, and edify believers, would be much encouraged, could they see the large rewards of honest industry, enjoyed by masters of families, attended with a growing conformity to men like *Cornelius*, in almsgiving and devotion; and the females imitating *Dorcas*; instead of wasting their hours in unimproving circles.

A view of the dangers of unhallowed Prosperity, may suppress the spirit of enterprize (to which the present conduct of trade, and stock-gambling invite) by which many are aspiring to gilded misery. A seasonable admonition, may prevent their infringing on the property of others, and preserve from infamy their own characters; and, above all, save from reproach the profession of our
common

common salvation, which a worldly spirit has brought upon it, especially when indulged by those, who profess it, in its most rigid forms.

That these good purposes may be answered, by this Mite, cast into the Treasury of public instruction, is the sincere prayer of

THE AUTHOR.

Highbury Place,
20th January, 1789,

A

S E R M O N, &c.

P S A L M XXX. 6.

AND IN MY PROSPERITY, I SAID, I SHALL
NEVER BE MOVED.

THIS Psalm was probably composed by *David*, on his re-visiting the sanctuary, after a joyful recovery from some dangerous illness. Having expressed his gratitude to God, for the event, he, in verses 6, 7, describes his former prosperity, succeeded by affliction: “ And, in my Prosperity, I said, I shall never be moved.

B

“ LORD,

“ LORD, by thy favour, thou hast made
 “ my mountain to stand strong : Thou didst
 “ hide thy face, and I was troubled.”

On reading our Text, we are made acquainted with one of the principal snares of Prosperity ; that is, *Security*. “ I said, I
 “ shall never be moved.” He had enjoyed *health* ; but it was followed by *sickness*. The strong man must not glory in his strength. The frame of our bodies, the accidents to which they are exposed without, and the diseases they are liable to within, may convince us, that the most robust in constitution “ are grass,” which may not only *wither*, but *die* in an hour.

Mental advantages are uncertain also. We have heard of some, who have had a distinguished rank among the wise, being reduced to idiotism, in the prime of life, and dying without knowledge.

Age frequently impairs vigour of mind. It is said, that the great NEWTON, in the advanced period of his life, was unable to

comprehend his own works: That understanding, which once penetrated far beyond the limits of the visible creation, became so debilitated, as to be incapable of retracing its own progress: A memorable instance of human infirmity, sufficient to humble Pride, and silence Envy * !

Things that are called, the external goods of fortune, are transient: Riches make themselves wings, and fly away, as an Eagle, with strength and swiftness, and so as not to be recalled. Let none who possess sublunary good, say, In our Prosperity we shall never be moved. No human foresight, or prudence, can insure continued prosperity. To expect it, as Christians, is to be more presumptuous than *David*, who lived under a religious constitution, that had, by covenant, *temporal* rewards annexed to obedience, As Christians, we look not for the quiet possession of a " Land flowing with milk and honey ;" but to an " Inheritance in-

* Knox.

B 2

" cor-

“ corruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not
 “ away, reserved in Heaven.”

Agreeably to this, Lord Bacon observes,
 that “ *Prosperity* was the blessing of the
 “ Old Testament, and *Adversity* of the New;
 “ yet, in the Old Testament, if we listen to
 “ *David’s* Harp, we hear as many Hearse-
 “ like airs, as Carols; and the pencil of the
 “ HOLY GHOST has laboured more, in de-
 “ scribing the afflictions of *Job*, than the
 “ felicities of *Solomon*.”

In the season of light and joy, let none
 neglect to prepare for the approaching days
 of sorrow and darkness.

The subject which the Text offers to our
 meditation, requires me to shew,

1st. What Prosperity is; and why it is
 attended with snares.

2dly. What those snares are. And,

3dly. How they are to be avoided.

I. First.

I. First. Prosperity consists in a confluence of earthly enjoyments ; which may include *Wealth*. *Solomon* says, Ecc. x. 19. " Money answereth all things ; " it is the medium, by which every outward advantage may be procured. Money is called a *defence*, Ecc. vii. 12. It often gains protection and safety from dangers ; and sometimes rescues from the hand of Justice, those, whose enormities have merited an ignominious death. *Honour and Influence*. The man is prosperous, who has the credit and power of superior office, civil or ecclesiastical ; and, should there be a display of shining talents in the discharge of official duty, and success attend their application, his Prosperity is of the most flattering kind. To complete a prosperous condition, there must be circumstances that will allow us to gratify our love of *pleasure, ease, and society* ; as *Health* ; for what are *Wealth, Reputation, and Influence*, to him, whose life is rendered comfortless and wretched through disease ? Hear him speak ; " I am made to possess months of " vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed " to me. When I lie down, I say, when

" shall I arise, and the night be gone? and
 " I am full of tossings to and fro unto the
 " dawning of the day," Job vii. 3, 4. A
Family, wherein to exercise social affections;
 a wife, that is as the loving hind and plea-
 sant roe, and a healthy offspring. *Job*,
 under his affliction, mentions, as an ingre-
 dient of his former Prosperity, that " His
 " children were about him," Job xxix. 5;
 and says, of those who were in that condi-
 tion, that " Their seed is established in their
 " fight, with them, and their offspring before
 " their eyes. They send forth their little
 " ones like a flock, and their children dance.
 " They take the timbrel, and harp, and re-
 " joice at the sound of the organ." To our
 domestic circle must be added, agreeable
 connexions in the world; for what is life
 without friendship! What more refreshful
 and comfortable, than the kind converse,
 and prudent counsels of affectionate friends!
 " Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart;
 " so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by
 " hearty counsel," Prov. xxvii. 9.

These

These are the things which constitute a state of Prosperity. All are not in the lot of every prosperous man; and *Wealth* only, without *Reputation*, or *Social comforts*, is, by some, deemed sufficient to place the possessor among the prosperous.

It may be asked, Why is Prosperity attended with snares?

There is no evil in the things themselves, that constitute Prosperity: They are the gifts of God. To Him we are indebted for *Wealth*. "The LORD maketh rich." 2 Sam. ii. 7. "The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the Maker of them all." Prov. xxii. 2. *Honour* is from God, Psalm xcv. 6, 7. *Health*. Job x. 5. *Domestic felicity*. Psalm lxviii. 6. And *Friends* are from Him. Gen. xxxix. 2, 3, 4. These agreeables in life, flowing from the Goodness of God, have no tendency to hurt us, but the contrary. The snares of Prosperity are in our depraved nature: A bad heart counteracts the genuine tendency of the good things of Providence. The Bee and the

Spider extract honey and poison from the same flower ; the poison is not in the flower, but in the Spider. Good men are often more holy in themselves, and more useful to others, in consequence of creature comforts ; whilst the sensual (like the Ocean that changes the sweet showers of Heaven into its salt quality) turn the blessings of God into provision for their brutish lusts. The ensnaring nature of earthly good, depends on the *disposition* of the possessor. The food that renews the blood and spirits of one man, and preserves his life, shall nourish the disease of another, and hasten his death.

Hence we observe, that the snares of Prosperity, are greater, or less, to different persons. Some are *born* to affluence ; these are not exposed to the same degree of danger, as those who suddenly arrive to great estate,

This commercial City, affords many instances of persons who have hastily risen from extreme indigence, to overgrown, and, I fear, guilty opulency. “ He that maketh
“ haste to be rich, shall not be innocent.”

Hasty

Hasty gotten wealth, insnares more than patrimony, or that which is accumulated by slow degrees. Not a little will depend on the good sense of the prosperous: if a man of weak intellects, or whose sense has not led him to self-acquaintance, be successful, his danger is the greater, success will occasion his more speedy ruin; for, "The Prosperity of fools shall destroy them." Prov. i. 32. The entanglements of a superior condition, are seldom very perilous, to a man whose heart is renewed by the grace of the Gospel, and who has been led through scenes of sanctified affliction; These will fix such a conviction of the vanity of earthly things in the mind, that their presence, or absence, are not of much consequence to him, who is a genuine disciple of that Master, of whom St. Paul had learnt, in every state, to be content.

2. Secondly, We are to enquire, What snares there are in a prosperous condition.

They vary in different countries, and in different places in the same country. The
wife

wife and happy constitution of English government, will not allow a prosperous and powerful *Ahab* to take away *Naboth's* vineyard, by oppression or blood. The snares of the citizen and villager, of the courtier and the merchant, are not the same. I am addressing citizens and tradesmen. The snares of *your* Prosperity, I shall attempt to develop. In a moral view, you all rank with the *religious*, or the *irreligious*, (for there is no third class) I shall, therefore, consider

The snares attending the *irreligious*;—those who are not the subjects of spiritual life, implanted and nourished by the Gospel.

1st. *Foolish Pride*. Not that *any* pride has wisdom in it, but there is an estimate of self, the offspring of Prosperity, which exposes a man to the ridicule of the most superficial observer of his behaviour. "Pride com-
"passeth him about as a chain." Psalm lxxiii. 6. He wears it for an ornament about his neck. Abundance has increased that sense of self-importance, which every man feels, more or less, to a preposterous degree.

gree. He always had sentiments of unjust self-valuation, which were ever present in the mind, but these have grown, as money has been accumulated. This self-importance so fills him, that he spills it in every company, and cannot withhold overbearing claims to superiority, in any circle, where he apprehends himself the richest.

The absurdity of his pride, discovers itself, if of low parentage, in examining his pedigree. He fails not to find illustrious ancestors, and kindred among the great. He blushes to meet any one, who happens to know the hovel in which he was born, and conceals his *real origin*, with more solicitude, than his *foulest crimes*. His gesture, walk, voice, and address, are changed. When *poor*, he used intreaties; but now he is *rich*, he answers roughly. Prov. xviii. 23. He is haughty and contentious, and cannot brook contradiction. His mental furniture suddenly swells to an enormous bulk. While he remained in his corner, his knowledge was scanty; but *now* he understands the most abstruse things, and can pronounce exactly
what

what is true, just, and beautiful in Religion, Government, and Learning. Now, in Prosperity, he imagines he shall never be moved. Success emboldens him to launch into an expensive style of life; a country house, watering places, and fashionable amusements, soon precipitate him from the summit of grandeur he had attained: and behold his name is in the Gazette, or his person in a loathsome prison! Thus is he snared, and taken. “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

2dly. Worldly Prosperity makes the salvation of the soul improbable. “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!” Mark x. 23. Their attention is confined to the *body*; and the present and future happiness of the *soul* is forgotten, or at least disregarded; the Gospel is despised, and the means of Grace are neglected. “I spake unto thee in thy Prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear.” Jer. xxii. 21. If the means of religion be slighted, final ruin is inevitable; for CHRIST is the Author of
“eternal

“ eternal falvation, to those *only* who obey
 “ Him.”

If persons of affluence be humane and charitable, their liberality to the poor, furnishes a righteousness, on which they depend ; and that ill-directed confidence will exclude from the Kingdom of Heaven ; for “ By the deeds
 “ of the law, shall no flesh be justified : We
 “ are justified freely by Grace, not of works,
 “ lest any man should boast.”

Prosperity is considered, by many, as an unequivocal proof of interest in Divine favour. This unscriptural notion, prevents their seeking what they fondly imagine is already possessed. Moreover, their condition deprives them of what the poor man often enjoys, *faithful warnings and reproofs*. The rich are surrounded with flatterers ; they seldom hear the truth ; their *foibles* are considered as *virtues*, and frequently adopted as such, by those, whose narrow minds, and sordid passions, yield a ready homage to the *golden image*, whenever it is presented.

Thus,

Thus, by living to our inferior nature, *the flesh*, and neglecting the means of grace;—by self-righteousness, presumption, and servile adulation, are the prosperous snared, so as finally to be drowned in destruction and perdition.

II. We are to consider next, the snares, which are apt to entangle *religious men* in Prosperity.

1st. The first is, *a secret alienation of heart from God*. The external profession may be unblemished, while the devout exercises of the soul are few, and languid. Prosperity often lessens *confidence* in God. Things are in a train; rents, dividends, or the profits of a well-established business, bring certain supplies. Faith, in the providential kindness of God, is not, in such circumstances, so likely to be exercised, as by the man who asks for daily bread, and receives it only for the day, not knowing what to-morrow will bring forth.

Divine

Divine *meditation* is not so frequent and affectionate. The affairs of the opulent are widely extended. Objects that employ thought, and awaken care and anxiety, are so numerous, that instead of rest, or a remembrance of God, on their bed, “The abundance of the rich will not suffer them to sleep.” The mind is incumbered, and performs the debasing task of revolving earthly things; while others, less loaded with thick clay, repose, or, remembering God on their beds, are satisfied as with marrow and fatness.

In ordinances, the prosperous are often spiritless and formal. They are exempt from those trials which sweeten God’s promises, and generally add fervour and life to prayer. This alienation of heart from God, appears by the little fellowship they have with their brethren, in Church communion: Their rest in *Zion* is not constant: They behave like strangers; and, in many religious societies, the rich are only monthly guests. Some of the wealthy brethren do not forsake the assembling of themselves together;

gether; but, acting on the maxims of a worldly kingdom, they put in claims to influence and superiority, which do not add to the comfort of Ministers, or conciliate the esteem of their brethren. From hence it is obvious, that Christians, by Prosperity, are often deprived of the pleasures of faith, divine meditation, and Christian fellowship.

2dly. Prosperity, too often, leads religious men into a sinful conformity to the world: They are constrained, from social obligations, to a civil intercourse, with persons of their own rank and fortune. Were they to make good men, who are much below them, their chosen companions, it would induce a spirit of discontent and pride, which would render them unhappy, and less ornamental in their own inferior station. In civil life, every man should keep his rank. Prosperity places a man among the rich, many of whom are gay and dissipated, if not intolerably vicious. Association, without conformity, is difficult: Hence, good men, raised above mediocrity of circumstances,
are

are in danger of complying with the manners of their equals, in their vain expensive shew, their amusements, late visits (which destroy closet and family religion) and the mode of educating their children. The erasement of the lines of separation, which distinguish the Church from the World (especially among wealthy Protestant Dissenters) accounts for the degeneracy of their rising families, from whence, we fear, our decaying Churches will not be furnished with rebuilding materials.

3dly. A sinful and imprudent indulgence of the flesh. The prosperous in this city, are fallen into an expensive, luxurious gratification of the flesh, forbidden by good sense and Christianity. If you invite an inferior to a table spread with expensive rarities, it is a cruel attack upon his feelings, which politeness reprobates. Why make him feel a painful sense of inferiority, and expose him to the temptation of envy or discontent? If a superior visit you, is not your aspiring to equality an offence? If your guest be an equal, you impose on him a

C

necessity

necessity of entertaining you in like manner; for he fears offering an affront, or the imputation of parsimony, by preparing a less dainty repast.

Dress should be suited to our fortune, rank, and professional engagements in society: But eagerness to be in every new fashion, and entering into it's extremes, prove these exterior things are worn as much in the *mind*, as on the *body*: And surely, christians are ensnared, when they dress as if they forgot, that the beauty of holiness were their chief ornament.

Never to stir out but in a carriage, injures health, and unfits (with other mentioned indulgences) for what may happen in a world of perpetual change. "They that did feed delicately, are desolate in the streets: They that were brought up in scarlet, embrace dunghills," Lam. iv. 5. A voluntary self-denial should be occasionally imposed, to preserve some measure of independence of what may soon be irrecoverably lost.

We proceed,

III. Thirdly, to give some directions how to avoid the snares of Prosperity.

1st. Judge of worth by a proper standard. The soul gives man a pre-eminence above beasts. You do not judge of a horse by his fine harness. When you form an estimate of character by outward circumstances, *you lose the man entirely*. When you behold a person in mean apparel, do not conclude, that he is neither wise nor happy: He may be both. The fear of God, and the love of men, are the qualities by which we are to judge of characters. These are, in the sight of God, of great price: Our honour, or disgrace, at the day of judgement, will depend on them;—yea, a happy or miserable eternity. Accustom yourselves to bow to *merit*, and not to *wealth*. Ignorant, and vicious opulence deserves contempt. Keep yourselves from idols. The golden calf is not thy God, O Israel!

2dly. Get acquainted with the snares of Prosperity. The prosperous are "set in slippery places," Psalm lxxiii. 18. Consult your own hearts; and observe what occurs in the world around you. Do you know any one, who, after great success, discovers more christian circumspection, and more deadness to the world? Consider what has been said. In this world, the wicked, by Prosperity, are bloated with pride, and, in the next, exposed to damnation. The christian sustains great loss: Too frequently, he sacrifices the pleasures of communion with God, and edifying fellowship with the Church. God receives less honour from him, as a witness: His conformity to the world, renders his testimony for God less distinct, and efficacious: He is so debased, by fleshly indulgences, that he scarcely maintains the superiority of the soul above the body. In prosperous scenes, we have seen the shield of the mighty vilely thrown away; the shield of one redeemed to be a King, as though he had not been anointed with oil. *David*, in adversity, had a tenderness of conscience, which made him regret the cutting off *Saul's* skirt:

skirt: But, when exalted, he seems to have been so hardened, even in the matter of *Uriah*, as not to have laid it to heart, until *Nathan's* message recovered him to repentance.

3dly. Practise the duties of Prosperity.

All endowments, natural or acquired, providential or gracious, are talents given by their Author, with the charge, "Occupy till I come." The obvious duties of Prosperity, are, humility and gratitude towards God, Gen. xxxii. 10. 1 Cor. iv. 7. Psalm ciii. 1, 2.; moderation and temperance, as to ourselves, 1 Cor. vii. 30, 31; and compassion towards men, Amos vi. 4. 1 John iii. 17. Do not lay out all on yourselves. Attend to the charge addressed to the rich, 1st Timothy vi. 17, 18, 19. Such an application of wealth, will be an evidence of the sincerity of your profession; and you will exemplify the power of the grace of God. Temperance, in a cottage, where there are only things necessary to satisfy hunger and thirst, is the effect more of necessity than choice: But temperance, amidst

incentives to sensuality;—in Prosperity, to be serious and religious;—*then* to despise the splendid vanities of the world;—is virtue of a superior order. 2 Chron. xvii. 5, 6.

4thly. Exercise faith in JESUS CHRIST. Being informed of what is valuable, and aware of your personal danger, and acquainted with the indispensable duties of your condition; you will be unable to escape the snares that lie in your way, without supernatural succours. A very little acquaintance with the world will bring to our notice, persons, who not only know what is right, but can give good counsel to others, who are *themselves* without conduct: Their passions overcome their understandings. A lively faith in CHRIST, will save from the pernicious influence of sensible objects: It will shew us a better, and more enduring treasure; for it is the “ Substance of things hoped for,” Heb. xi. 1. “ Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that JESUS is the Son of God?” 1 John v. 5. It is by a believing regard to God’s promises, which are “ yea, and amen,”
“ in

“in CHRIST,” that we are made partakers of a divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world, through lust. This important grace, exercised in contemplating the glorious person of the SAVIOUR, transforms the soul, and obtains seasonable supplies of the HOLY SPIRIT; by whose aid, we “mortify the deeds of the body, and live.” All self-devised methods of escape from the fascinating power of the world, will fail; but the faith which leads us to glory in the cross of CHRIST, will insure to us a triumphant conquest, as well as to St. Paul, and those *primitive champions* for the faith, who “overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony.”

By way of Improvement, we may observe,

1st. That prosperous men are rather to be *pitied* than *envied*. “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl, for your miseries that shall come upon you.” James v. 1. In this world, you seldom enjoy the

undisturbed rest of your labourers. " The
 " sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether
 " he eat little or much : but the abundance
 " of the rich will not suffer him to sleep."
 Ecc. v. 12. Though harassed with painful
 anxieties in the world, you desire to remain
 in it : But your wish will not be granted.
 The multitude of your riches, will not di-
 vert the King of Terrors from executing his
 commission. The frantick soul, raving round
 it's clay tenement, will ask in vain to be
 spared a little longer. Then " Be not thou
 " afraid when one is made rich, when the
 " glory of his house is increased : For when
 " he dieth, he shall carry nothing away :
 " His glory shall not descend after him."
 Psalm xlix. 16, 17. " As for man, his
 " days are as grass : As a flower of the field,
 " so he flourisheth." Psalm ciii. 15 : And
 " He (says an elegant author) who alloweth
 " himself time to consider how soon the
 " fairest spring must give place to a burning
 " summer, a blighting autumn, and a kill-
 " ing winter ; will no longer *envy*, but *pity*
 " the fading verdure of the grass, and the
 " still

“ still more transient glories of the flowers
“ of the field.”

Follow the men of unhallowed Prosperity into the invisible world, and hear their Judge saying, “ Wo unto you rich ! for you have “ received your consolation.” In Hell they “ lift up their eyes, being in torments.” They ask relief, Luke xvi. 24, but the inexorable Judge has placed an unpassable gulf, which forbids the conveyance even of a drop of water, to mitigate the torments of yonder flame.

2dly. God is wise and good in withhold-
ing Prosperity from many who aspire after it.

Weak parents, often gratify the present desires of their children, at the expence of their future advantage. God has pity for His children ; but it is united with wisdom ; therefore does He often hinder those He loves, from obtaining what would clog their salvation with difficulties ; or take away what He has bestowed. Others have their Prosperity embittered by personal or relative affliction ;
and

and not seldom by a knowledge of the mortifying speeches of the envious. In various ways, God can make the honey to wear a sting, and the rose a thorn; and plant a thistly sorrow close by the tree, under the shadow of which, we are apt to expect unalloyed pleasure. Many who have been exposed to danger, by affluence of riches, have experienced what the King of Israel confesses, Psalm cxix. 71. "It is good for me, that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."

3dly. Let our meditations on this subject, conclude with the excellent prayer, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain," Prov. xxx. 8, 9. There is reason for prayer, because "Those things in Prosperity that attract us (says *Saurin*) are golden chains, splendid punishments, brilliant prisons and dungeons. A private condition, a moderate income, a few tried friends, a chosen circle,

"cle,

“cle, virtuous relations, business to pre-
 “serve vigour of mind, without fatiguing
 “it:—This is an inestimable mediocrity, to
 “be preferred before the most glorious sceptre,
 “the best established throne, the most bril-
 “liant crown.”

I shall conclude, with the advice of the
 immortal *Bacon*. “Seek not proud riches;
 “but such as you may get justly, use so-
 “berly, distribute cheerfully, and leave con-
 “tentedly.” God grant us this grace.
 Amen.

"the virtuous relations, befalls not
"the vigor of mind, without suffering
"it:—This is an inevitable necessity, to
"be preferred before the most glorious future,
"the best established throne, the most bril-
"liant crown."

I shall conclude, with the advice of the
"immortal Bacon: "Seek not proud riches;
"but such as you may get justly, the so-
"ber, diffusive cheerfulness, and pure con-
"tently." God grant us this grace.
Amen.

AN
ESSAY
ON
VISITING.

1822

Nov 3

W. I. S. I. N. C.

A N

E S S A Y

O N

V I S I T I N G.

NATURAL constitution, education, professional studies, and our connexions, may variously bias the mind, and determine our views on different subjects. I profess not to be superior to the influence of these, in the judgement I form of the present state of visiting, among the professors of religion in London.

I shall,

I shall, however, be pardoned my mistake, because I err with integrity and benevolence; and what I have to offer on this topick, is intended to *profit*, not to *upbraid*, or *offend*.

To condemn all social intercourse, is to censure that Wisdom, which said, in the beginning, "It is not good for man to be alone." It is to speak against what every man, naturally and innocently, feels *within* him, as well as the constitution of things *without* him. The advantages of friendly visits, are very numerous, and important. They may subserve the increase of knowledge; and many, who know little of books, have reaped no small benefit, from *walking with the wise*: and persons who have devoted time to reading, and solitary meditation, will acknowledge, they owe a great deal to social converse, even with those who had not much to communicate; for intellectual property is improved by circulation.

The *christian* finds in society occasions for the exercises of those graces which give a just right to that name. The variety of circumstances

stances in which our friends are placed, by inevitable vicissitudes, call for, and improve, our sympathy and liberality; our spirit of prayer and praise. Opportunities will offer, of weeping with them that weep, and of rejoicing with them that rejoice; and also of visiting the fatherless and widows, in their affliction, and, by seasonable alms, practising one great duty of pure and undefiled religion, before GOD and the FATHER. In society, we shall find means of humility and charity: There we may meet persons, much wiser than ourselves; and bigotry will gradually vanish away, at the presence of truth and excellence, in men, who were *judged*, without being *known*. Surely, that indulgence to society, which terminates in leaving our own *little world*, and gives a view of truth and goodness, in GOD's *great world*, is not only permitted, but is our bounden duty.

A minister of religion, need not deem the time lost, he devotes to friendly visits. He will find *living* objections to truth and duty, which books will not supply. He learns,
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what are the wants and dangers of his hearers, and can better speak to the particular cases of individuals, and make his discourses more interesting and useful. Moreover, by familiar converse, he conciliates regard, removes prejudices, and has an opportunity of borrowing the influence of *others*, where *his own* is deficient, to serve the cause of CHRIST and his poor. Thus, may society contribute to the cultivation of the understanding; the improvement of the heart; and the usefulness of life. But are these the ends answered by the social spirit of the age? Does it not flow from a wrong state of mind? Pride of *person* and *attire*, make many impatient of solitude: They are *dressed*, and *must* be seen. A mind, vacant as an empty room, through ignorance, has no materials for satisfying and ennobling meditations. A heart indisposed to devotion, and doing real good, anxiously looks out for relief, under the fatigues of leisure and idleness, in a circle, where dress, furniture, and fashions, may be seen; curiosity gratified; and an oblivion of guilt and misery obtained.

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This social spirit, which, I fear, *proceeds from evil, tends also to evil.* The absent are not infrequently scandalized: A fact, which was only a plain piece of wire, by passing through different hands, receives a head, a polish, and a sharp point, to wound the reputation of the innocent. Young tradesmen are often involved in a ruinous expence of time and money; having been taught, by custom, that visiting will procure connexions, and connexions, business. They soon grow halt, and are weary of this path; yet they tread on, until embarrassed circumstances, and the flight of their *dear five hundred friends*, &c. make their mistake disgracefully notorious. Do not, unfortunate men (as you are called) become clamorous against hard-hearted creditors. It is the saying of one, whose situation qualifies to decide justly on the point, that, "For *one* cruel creditor, " that appears in our Courts of Law, there " are *twenty* cruel debtors." Sad delusion! to substitute gay intercourse, in the room of frugality in the family, and industry, integrity, and dispatch, in the warehouse! These virtues lead to success, in a way tend-

ing to general advantage ; but dissipation, and unwarrantable and desperate schemes of speculation, are precipitating into ruin, a country, which has been aggrandized by the virtuous conduct of it's commercial transactions.

Did the melancholy effects of the present mode of visiting, terminate in temporal detriment, our regret might be moderate. But who can refrain from passionate lamentation, that views the injury done to the immortal soul ? The mind, for want of well-spent retirement, is deprived of acquaintance with God and itself, and the satisfactions of home-society.

When a few hours' recess from domestick engagements, and the hurry of the warehouse, can be obtained, the enquiry is, *Who shall we visit ? Or, Who shall we receive ?* Then, powdered, scented, furbelowed, and flounced, they are prepared to exhibit the body, to starve the mind, and forego improvement, and the soothing delights of domestick life; by turning their backs on

books and closet, and prattling children, to seek *abroad*, that happiness, which is a *home-born*, and *fireside* enjoyment.

This excess, and ill-conduct, of what is termed *friendly visiting*, account for the decay of family religion. If personal religion, in its power, be unknown, and unsought by the Heads of families; the most important interests of children, and servants, will be neglected. Reading the Scriptures, and prayer to God, are duties which conscience and utility urge in vain. Why complain of untoward children, and degenerate servants? Let your resentments terminate on yourselves. Have not what you have done, and omitted, taught them, that getting, and spending money; and dressing, to pay and receive visits, or attend places of fashionable amusement, are the first concerns of man? What avail the gloomy duties of a Sabbath evening, when the spirit of the father and master, the mother and mistress, is manifestly the spirit of this world, and their conversation favouring of its maxims, and their actions regulated by them?

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Are the shepherds of the flock untainted by this evil practice—Excess of Visiting? Do they exhibit, in the parlour, lucid proof of sincerity in publick preaching, and a firm belief of what they teach? I am aware, the ground I tread is sacred; and wish not wantonly to censure, but rather to draw a veil over the nakedness of my fathers and brethren; sensible how much I want the covering of charity myself.

None will deem me impertinent, in asking *questions* without *imputations*.

Are not professedly grave Ministers betrayed into *levity* and *flattery*, in company, which take off the edge of their solemn and pointed addresses in publick?

Are they not oftener overborn by the trifling spirit of mixed society, than gaining an ascendancy over it, to general edification?

Are they not, owing to a devoting of their time to social intercourse, frequently hurried
into

into the pulpit, without previous and sufficient preparation?

Unstrung and dissipated by society, do they not often preach *old sermons* to their flock? Do not some stoop to be news-carriers; and, by divulging the familiar manners, and private occurrences of families, sow discord, and separate chief friends? Are there grave and learned Clerks, who thus degrade themselves? I impute the affirmative of these interrogatories to none. Every Minister has a *tribunal* in his own bosom; and he will stand before *another* shortly, from which he will be dismissed, to spend an *eternity*, according to the manner in which he has spent his *time*.

It is *partial* friendship which points out defects, without shewing their remedy.

The following rules are recommended, and, by the observation of them, our lives may be *social*, without being *dissipated*.

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The heart must contain, or be disposed to receive, *a good treasure*, in order to society's being useful. Empty vessels, by associating, can never fill each other. "Let the word of CHRIST dwell in you richly, in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual Songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto the LORD." Col. iii. 16. St. Paul thought knowledge and benevolence, qualifications for profitable intercourse, where he says, "I am persuaded of you, brethren, that ye, also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another," Rom. xv. 14. "Let your conversation be with grace, seasoned with salt;" this will preserve it from corruption, and heighten it's flavour. *Prayer, and dependance on God*, will make our knowledge practical, and our benevolence active.

While there is an attention to our own hearts, caution should be used in the choice of our connexions. The example of *David* must

must be imitated, who says, " I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." Psalm cxix.

63. Secular obligations will, doubtless, constrain christians into the company of characters very different from these : But, when duty calls them, they may expect to be preserved from evil, if their stay be no longer than the dispatch of business requires. In voluntary friendly visits, all cannot act alike. A warm vigorous disciple, may venture with safety, where another would be chilled into cowardice, and sacrifice the chief ornament of a christian, *consistency*. " Let your moderation be known unto all men." In visiting, this is a precept of great consequence. He was truly wise, who said, " Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house, lest he be weary of thee." Prov. xxv. 17. Weary, through the want of a wise choice in the *season*, and moderation in the *number*, and *length* of thy visits.

It is not unlawful to decline a connexion, where the evil we receive, is more in proportion,

portion, than the good we communicate. Where the point of *usefulness* cannot be gained, Wisdom says, *Retreat*; for time is an invaluable talent; it is short; and the day of reckoning, with our absent LORD, advances fast. An ever-present sense of this, will stimulate to a conversation becoming saints, and prevent "foolish talking" and jesting, which are not convenient." Eph. v. 3, 4. At that day of final recompence, we shall hear of past conversations, perhaps now forgotten by us. "I say unto you, that every idle word that men speak, they shall give account thereof, in the day of judgement." Matt. xii. 36, 37. Then shall all those who have lived, and visited, and talked in the fear of God, know, that He saw them, with a delighted eye, and heard them, with an approving ear. "Then they that feared the LORD, spake often one to another; and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the LORD, and thought upon His name, And they shall be mine,"

"faith

“saith the LORD of Hosts, in that day
 “when I make up my jewels ; and I will
 “spare them, as a man spareth his own
 “son that serveth him.” Malachi iii.
 16, 17.

F I N I S,

"With the Lord of Hosts, in that day
"when I make up my jewels; and I will
"spare them, as a man spareth his own
"son that loveth him." Malachi iii.

16, 17. *[Faint text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side]*

F I N I S

[Faint text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side]

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